

History and identity among the Hemshin

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In the summer of 1962, the renowned French linguist Georges Dumézil was introduced in Istanbul to a young man said to speak a ‘strange idiom’ as his first language. This ‘strange idiom’ was in fact a dialect of Armenian called *Homshetsma* spoken in some two dozen villages in northeastern Turkey by the Hemshin or Hemshinli, descendants of Islamicized Armenians from Hamshen.¹ For one month, Dumézil would meet every evening with this young man, İsmet Akbıyık, to study his dialect. The results of Dumézil’s research would appear in four articles published between 1964 and 1986. The most fascinating part of the story, however, was that the young Hemshinli did not know that he spoke an Armenian dialect and was most surprised when Dumézil informed him of this fact. İsmet Akbıyık, who came from the village of Ardala in Hopa, had been living in Istanbul for 10 months. He had noticed while at the beach that he could understand parts of conversations held in a non-Turkish language (i.e. Armenian spoken by Istanbul Armenians) by people who obviously did not hail from his region, but had not pushed the matter further.²

Anecdotes which tell of accidental meetings between Istanbul Armenians and Hemshin and describe the surprise of the latter to learn that they speak Armenian are not uncommon.³ They add to the mystery surrounding the Hemshin as former Christians who converted to Islam centuries ago yet did not assimilate into the culture of the surrounding Muslim populations, as Turks who speak Armenian yet are not aware of it, as Muslims who continue to celebrate feasts that are part of the calendar of the Armenian Church, and as descendants of Armenians who, for the most part, have chosen to deny their Armenian origins in favour of recently invented myths of Turkic ancestry.

The Hemshin have been the focus of increased interest in recent years by scholars and laymen alike. Armenians, both in the diaspora and in Armenia, have rediscovered the existence of this group of people speaking Armenian yet professing Islam and are curious to learn more about them. With the gradual softening of restrictions on political freedom in Turkey during the 1990s, Turks have felt freer to discuss Muslim ethnic groups, a subject taboo until then in a country that only recognized non-Muslim Greeks, Armenians and Jews as official minorities. A large number of publications on ethnic groups ranging from

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Cretan Muslims to Circassians have appeared in recent years.⁴ It is rare today to find bookstores in Istanbul that do not display an 'etnik' section. This has allowed a certain awareness of the Hemshinli to take hold in Turkey, even though they are much less known or discussed than larger groups such as their Lazi or Georgian Muslims neighbours.

Increased interest in the Hemshin is certainly not limited to Armenians and Turks and has taken on an authentic international character. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 has contributed to the opening up of the entire eastern Black Sea region and to an increase in the flow of visitors to the area. In the particular case of Hemshin, opportunities to go trekking and mountain climbing in the Kaçkar Mountains have attracted an increasing flow of Turks and foreigners since the early 1990s. The mystery of Hemshin origins and identity, the linguistic peculiarities of the Hemshin, their fair complexion and light-coloured eyes, the bright, traditional headgear worn exclusively by Hemshin women,⁵ and the striking beauty and lushness of their mountains and valleys, have all combined to make the Hemshin and their home region a favourite topic of authors of guidebooks about Turkey and of journalists writing articles on travel in that country.⁶ An August 2005 article with the evocative title 'How green is their valley', which the renowned British weekly *The Economist* devoted to the development of tourism in Hemshin and its sometimes attending negative consequences on the environment, is an example of the world's growing awareness of the region.⁷

If there is increasing curiosity among outsiders to learn more about Hemshin history and the Hemshin's perception of their own identity, this curiosity is not always welcomed by the Hemshinli themselves, many of whom would prefer the floodlights of attention to be pointed away from them. There can be little doubt that many Hemshin miss the period when, isolated in their valleys, they could simply exist without having to answer questions about their identity. No Hemshin intellectuals have come forward to 'invent' or establish the credentials of a Hemshin nation.⁸ Yet, the question as to who the Hemshin are is increasingly asked not only by outsiders, but by the younger generation of Hemshinli, many of whom were born or raised in the large cities of western Turkey. Moreover, the tenacious survival of the Hemshin as a distinct group under circumstances that threaten the survival of a minority's identity warrants a discussion on how the Hemshin conceive of their history and manage identity issues. This discussion is not only relevant to the Hemshin themselves, but also to studies on the Turkish state and on Armenians at large. The continued existence of the Hemshinli impels an examination of the policies of the Turkish state and its nationalist elites *vis-à-vis* minority groups such as the Hemshin and affects, even if marginally, long-held assumptions on Armenian identity.

Hemshin territories and demographics

Peoples and communities are the product of their geography and the Hemshin do not constitute an exception to this rule. The protection offered by the formidable mountains of the Pontos has created from times immemorial a milieu particularly

favourable to the survival of numerous tribes and communal groups. The Pontic Mountains, which run parallel to the Black Sea, separate the coastline of Asia Minor from the interior Anatolian Plateau, resulting in a geographical setting similar to that of Lebanon and the Caspian provinces of Iran, which through the centuries have been known to provide a refuge to minority groups. The eastern Black Sea region of Turkey, composed of a succession of parallel valleys running south to north, from the mountains to the sea, has thus been a repository of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. In addition to the Hemshin, the region is home to Islamicized communities speaking Greek, Lazi and Georgian.

The valleys of the two branches of the Fırtına River form a highland district which corresponds to the southern part of the present-day Çamlıhemşin county (*ilçe*) of the Rize province (*il*). It is in these highlands that the first Armenians to migrate north of the Pontic Mountains in the late 8th century established their initial settlement. The Fırtına Valley (*dere*) later constituted the heartland of the historical Hamshen canton, which became known in Ottoman times as Hemshin.⁹ It is in the section where the affluents of the Fırtına River have their source, a place today referred to as the Kaçkar Range and known in the past as the Paryadres (Barhal or Parhal) Chain, that the Pontic Alps reach their highest altitude and are closest to the coast. The mountains of the Kaçkar Range reach an average of over 3000 meters and are in some areas less than 50 km from the coastline. On sunny days one can see from the place where the Fırtına flows into the sea, the Kaçkar (3932 m), the Tatos (3560 m) and the Verçenik (Varshamak or Varshambek in Armenian sources, at 3711 m) peaks. According to the authors of a travel guide to the region, 'those are some of the highest spots that can be seen at sea level anywhere on earth, rivalled only by a few points on the Andes and in New Guinea'.¹⁰ Clear days, however, are rare, for the mountains hem in the clouds coming from the sea, provoking abundant rainfall. Travellers to the region, such as the German botanist Karl Koch, have depicted the contrast between the mist-covered valleys and the sun-bathed mountain summits and pastures (*yaylas*) above the layer of clouds.¹¹ With an annual average of 114 days of rain—a figure that does not include foggy days with drizzle, one of the most frequent weather patterns in the region—the Fırtına Valley is the most humid area in Turkey and throughout the Black Sea region.¹² The consequence of such abundant rain is 'a natural flora of astonishing wealth and diversity: a quasi-tropical luxuriance that surpasses any other part of the Black Sea coast'.¹³

The other notable physical characteristic of Hamshen or Hemshin is its difficulty of access, if not outright inaccessibility. In addition to difficult access from the south due to the Paryadres/Kaçkar Mountains, entrance to the region from the coast is restricted by steep, rugged relief and dense forests, which also hinder travel and transport within Hemshin itself. Some of the paths are too narrow to be taken by horses and mules, leaving to humans the charge of sumpter beasts.¹⁴ The quasi-permanent fog that covers Hemshin, as well as the impediment to access caused by its forests, mountains and ravines, have left a strong impression on the rare visitors and writers who have heard of the district.

In *La Fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient*, Hetum of Korykos, of the royal Armenian house of Cilicia, the Frère Hayton of French sources, wrote that

In the realme of Georgi appered a gret meruayle, which I darred nat tell nor reherse yf I hadde nat sene it. But for bycause I was there and se, I dare say that in Georgi is a prouynce which is called Haynsen, the which is well of iii dayes iourney of length or there about; and as long as this sayd prouynce lasteth, in euery place is so great obscurite that no man is so hardi to come into the sayd lande, for they can nat cum out agayn. And the dwellers within the same lande sayde that often tymes there cometh noyse of men, cockes crowyng, and horses neyng; and by a fludde that cometh out of that place come tokens appering that there is resorting of people. Verily they fynde in thistores of Armeny redyng, and Georgi, that there was a cruell emperour in Persy name Sauorelx. This emperour worshypped the ydols, and cruelly persecuted the Cristen men. . . . And than the sayd Cristen men made a gret cry to Our Lorde God, and sone after came this great darknes that blinded themperour and all his men; and so the Cristen men scaped, and the sayd Emperour with his men taryd in the sayd darknes. And there thei shall abyde, as they beleue, to the worldes ende.¹⁵

From their heartland in the Firtina Valley, Hamshen Armenians spread over the centuries to the highland sections of neighbouring valleys, such as those of the Zuğa (Susa), Senes (Senoz) and Cimil rivers, which were included in the medieval principality of Hamshen and later in the Ottoman *kaza* of Hemshin.¹⁶ In a later, undetermined period, with estimates ranging from the mid 17th century to the early 19th, and in unknown circumstances, a portion of the by-then Islamicized Hamshen Armenians, or Hemshinli, migrated eastward to the region of Hopa. This migration led to the separation of the Hemshin into two communities almost oblivious to one another's existence, and separated not only by territory, but also by language and culture. The Hemshin who remained in their original homeland—known as Western, Rize, or Bash Hemshin—have been Turkish-speaking since around the second half of the 19th century. The exclusively Lazi county of Arhavi separates them from the Hopa, or Eastern Hemshinli. The latter, whose villages are now located administratively in the Hopa and Borçka counties of the Artvin province, have maintained the usage of the Hamshen Armenian dialect, or Homshetsma. Furthermore, the two Muslim Hemshin groups remain for the most part unaware of the existence of yet a third related community speaking a close if not identical dialect, the Christian Hamshen Armenians of Abkhazia and Krasnodar in Russia, whose ancestors fled Hamshen from the mid 17th century on to escape forced Islamicization.

In the late Ottoman period and in Republican Turkey, Hemshin settlement and migration have been characterized by four main trends. The first trend, in the aftermath of the 1877–1878 war with Russia, was migration toward the western Black Sea region, where some 15 or so Hemshin villages were established by both Bash and Hopa Hemshin groups in what are now the Düzce and Sakarya provinces. The Hemshinli had been preceded in the region by Hamshen Armenians who had migrated to the western Black Sea region from their villages around Ordu in 1873. According to Minas Gasapian, there appears to have been some solidarity

between the two groups originally from Hamshen, with the Christian Hamshenite Armenians helping the Muslim Hemshinli to settle in the region.¹⁷

The second trend was a northward expansion of the Hemshin into coastal areas. In the province of Rize, this migration started in the late Ottoman period when swamps around the coastal town of Ardeşen were drained and made suitable for cultivation. Inroads into coastal areas continued during the first half of the 20th century, changing the age-old pattern whereby the Hemshin lived only in highland areas while the coastal areas were the preserve of the Lazi. The Hemshin who moved toward the coast, however, did not mix with the Lazi but tended instead to establish their own separate neighbourhoods (*mahalles*) within Lazi villages. Expansion into coastal areas has allowed the Hemshin to participate in the cultivation of tea, a highly profitable cash crop introduced on a large scale in Rize by the Turkish government after 1950. However, the Hemshin have generally not been able to benefit from the rise of the tea industry in Rize as much as the Lazi, as tea could not be grown in traditional Hemshin villages located at higher altitudes or at least yielded a poorer return there than in coastal areas.¹⁸

A third, rather contemporary trend, shared by both Rize and Hopa Hemshin, is to acquire an apartment in coastal towns such as Pazar, Ardeşen or Hopa, where families spend the winter months. This modern-day transhumance allows people not only to spend the harshest winter months in the milder climate of the coast but also to take advantage of the better schooling, shopping and recreational opportunities of the coastal towns.¹⁹

A fourth and perhaps more important migratory trend that started in the 1950s and continues to this day, is the large-scale exodus of the Hemshin toward the large metropolitan centres of western Turkey, as a result of which many Hemshin-populated areas have declined in their number of inhabitants. The original Hemshin heartland in the Fırtına Valley (the Çamlıhemşin county) has been particularly affected by this out-migration, with its Hemshin population standing at less than 3000 people in 1997 compared to a figure of 6500—more than double—some thirty years earlier, in the 1965 census.²⁰ Moreover, this remaining population is mostly composed of elderly, the young having left their villages for Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. The latter typically return to their birthplace only during their summer vacation. In contrast, the Hopa Hemshin region has been relatively less affected by migration toward large cities and has thus been able to maintain its population levels.

Determining the figures of Hemshin population is difficult since official statistics in Turkey do not include data on ethnicity. Exact figures can be obtained from Turkish censuses for the villages exclusively populated by the Hemshinli, but one has to rely on estimates for all mixed settlements in the Rize and Artvin provinces and of course for the Hemshin living in the large cities of western Turkey. The Bash Hemshin are estimated to number around 29,000 individuals in the Rize province, while the Hopa Hemshin are estimated at around 26,000. To these figures must be added the 15 or so villages in the northwestern Black Sea provinces of Düzce and Sakarya, settled by both Bash and Hopa Hemshin groups during the last decades of the 19th century, with a population

of around 10,000. Large communities of Hemshin are also to be found in regional centres, such as Trabzon and Erzurum, and in the large cities of western Turkey, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. Hemshin living in the latter cities probably now outnumber those who have remained in their home villages. Also, an estimated 3000 Hemshin live in the former Soviet Union.²¹ Consequently, a total figure of approximately 150,000 individuals can be given as a realistic estimate.²²

A synopsis of Hemshin history

The history of Hamshen has been covered elsewhere and will not be repeated here.²³ Only the main points of Hemshin history will be briefly provided as a reminder before the introduction of the alternative, revisionist historical materials that have come to light during the 20th century. Hamshen was founded in the late 8th century by Armenian migrants fleeing Arab domination. The migrants were led by two members of the Amatuni princely family, Shapuh and his son Hamam. A principality of Hamshen survived until the late 15th century, when it was conquered by the Ottomans. Known by the latter as Hemshin, the district maintained its almost exclusively Armenian population until the mid 17th century, when a wave of conversion to Islam started. The part of the population refusing to convert left the area, as a result of which Hemshin became a predominantly Muslim region by the early 19th century. The evanescence of central power in the Pontos from the mid 17th century on and the ensuing instauration of a period marked by disorders and insecurity played a significant role in the conversion of the population of Hamshen to Islam. Until the reassertion of central power in the 1830s, regional power would be in the hands of competing local chieftains known as valley lords (*derebeys*). The often tyrannical rule of these valley lords and the anarchy caused by their wars would bring much misery to the local population. The situation was most unbearable for local Christians, many of whom were forced to seek protection in conversion. The converted population, however, did not, at least initially, adhere sincerely to Islam, and often remained secretly Christian at heart. As in other Armenian-populated areas where forced conversions occurred, the crypto-Christians of Hemshin became known as *kes-kes* (half-half in Armenian). Most of the Hemshin population in the 18th century was constituted of *kes-kes* and of those few remaining openly Christians.

In a process that probably took the entire 19th century to be complete, the number of *kes-kes* came to diminish as the number of sincere adherents to Islam conversely increased. Christian rituals perpetuated by the Hemshin, such as the celebration of the feast of *Vardavar* (the Feast of Transfiguration of Christ), would gradually lose their inherent religious meaning, the significance of which would be completely forgotten by the 20th century. Indeed, many Hemshinli would accomplish prestigious careers as Muslim clerics (*ulemas*) in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, while others would successfully climb the social ladder to become members of the Ottoman and later Republican Turkey political elite. These developments demonstrate not only the extent of the Islamicization of the Hemshinli, but also their complete integration within Ottoman Muslim society

from the 1830s on, following the fall of the derebeys and the reassertion of central power.²⁴

A development parallel to Islamicization would be the loss of the use of the Armenian language in Hemshin at some point in the second half of the 19th century, along with its replacement by a Turkish dialect peculiar to Hemshin and containing numerous Armenian loanwords. The process of Turkification would be completed when Armenian surnames such as Amedaṇç, Andun, Apeloğlu, Arakeloğlu, Avedikoğlu, Kirkoroğlu or Matoslar, which some Hemshin families had continued to carry, had to be abandoned after the adoption of a law reforming names in 1934.²⁵ It is not known when the Armenian first names still reported to be in use among Hemshinli women during the 1890s fell out of use.²⁶

Yet, with astonishing resilience, the Armenian dialect of Hamshen, or Homshetsma, continued to be spoken by one Islamicized community, namely the Hemshinli who had settled in the region of Hopa, to the east of Hemshin proper. The factors accounting for this survival are in all likelihood related to the Hopa Hemshinli not having participated in the social ascent enjoyed by the Bash Hemshin beginning in the 1850s and their lesser degree of integration when compared to the latter in Ottoman society as it developed in 19th century Pontos. Consequently, the Hopa Hemshinli were under less pressure and had fewer incentives to abandon their mother tongue.

Turkish nationalist representations of Hemshin history

Few Hemshinli in Turkey are acquainted nowadays with the historical account that has been presented above. Most, however, are familiar with a version of the Hemshin past that is more in line with the historical theories promoted actively by the Turkish state. In its broad strokes, this version of Hemshin history argues that the Hemshin are of pure Turkish stock and that they are the descendants of an authentic Turkish tribe. Historical and cultural links with Armenians are downplayed or simply denied, and the use of the Armenian language by the Hopa-Hemshin is attributed to their coexistence with Armenians in a distant past. This narrative is basically an extension to the Hemshin of historical and linguistic theories, the Turkish history thesis (*Türk tarih tezi*), and the extravagant 'sun language theory' (*güneş-dil teorisi*), created and supported by the Turkish Republic since the early 1930s as an integral part of the nation- and state-building process.²⁷

Theses claiming that Turks had been an established presence in Anatolia since at least two or three millennia before the Christian era and that the Hittites were a Turkic people had actually been advanced even before the official birth of the Turkish history thesis in 1932.²⁸ In the case of the Hemshin, one of the first recorded attempts to provide them with Turkish roots may also precede the early 1930s, as a Turkish author, Hüseyin Avni Bey (Tirebolulu Alparslan), spoke of 'Hemşin Türk' villages when referring to the Hemshin villages in the region of Hopa in 1921.²⁹ Because it is not clear, however, whether he meant

that the Hemshin were of Turkish origin or whether he used ‘Turk’ to describe a population that was Muslim and not Laz, the first certain attribution of Turkish origins to the Hemshin will have to be dated to the period immediately following the establishment of the Turkish history thesis. In a book first published in 1933, M. Rıza, the author of this first attribution, and an army officer like Tirebolulu Alparslan, made the following claim about the Hemshinli:

customs, lifestyle and ethnographic similarities show that this people derives from the Hatti-Hittite Turks. As stated at the beginning of this book, Armenian was once spoken by the pre-Islamic Turks due to the influence of the faith they had adopted, but as Muslims they returned to their Turkishness and acquired their national identity. Today, this people speaks Turkish; it does not know any other language.³⁰

However, the chief and most influential proponent of the thesis affirming Turkish origins for the Hemshin has been the historian M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu. In a 1966 article published in *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları*, Kırzioğlu narrates how he was infuriated by scholars such as Nikolai Marr and Vladimir Minorsky who had dared to claim that the Hemshin were Islamicized Armenians. Also, having met some Hemshinli, he was told by them that the Hemshin were the descendants of two Armenian Christian brothers, Ham/Hem and Shen/Shin, who had arrived in the current Hemshin region from the area between Kars and Erzurum or from Ani. Later, the descendants of these two brothers converted to the ‘beautiful and true’ Muslim religion. Kırzioğlu consequently set out to correct these mistakes and to inform the Hemshin of their authentic Turkishness.³¹

According to Kırzioğlu, the Hemshinli were a Turkish tribe that, originating in Khorasan, settled in the region of Hamadan in the mid 3rd century BC. From Hamadan, the ancestors of the Hemshinli moved with the Arsacids to the area of Oshakan and Aparan in Armenia during the rule of Ardashes II (85–123 AD [*sic*]), who is also presented as an Arsacid. The name of the ruling family of this Turkish tribe, ‘Amad-Uni’—why he splits the name Amaduni into two is not really clear—is said to have been derived from their long stay in Hamadan. Because Kırzioğlu equates the Amatunis with the Arsacids, who were Parthians and hence, according to the Turkish history thesis Turks, the Hemshinli are presented by him as ‘an ancient Oghuz’ (*Eski-Oğuz*) tribe. The Amatunis migrated to the valley of the Çoruh River in 604 and to the region of Hemshin in 620. The leader of the migrants, the ‘İlbeği Hamam Beg’, rebuilt the destroyed city of Dampur/Tambur and rebaptized it after his name, Hamamashen. The suffix ‘shen’, however, should not be understood as the Armenian ‘built by’, but derives from the Turkish word *şenlendirmek* (to populate). Hence Kırzioğlu’s preference for ‘Hemşenli’; it fits his theory on the etymology of Hemshin better than the conventional Turkish spelling ‘Hemşinli’. Adorned with such Turkish credentials, it should come as no surprise that the ‘Hemshenli’ are said to be ‘solid Muslims, pure Turks’ (*sağlam Müslüman, temiz Türk*) and to have a physical appearance of ‘the most beautiful Oghuz/Türkmen type’ (*en güzel Oğuz/Türkmen tipinde*). Because he is forced to acknowledge that some Hemshin

speak ‘ancient Armenian’, he tries to diminish the number of those speaking this dialect, and insists it is mixed with ‘ancient Oghuz’.³²

Throughout his writings, Kırzioğlu ‘finds’ a Turkish connection with every personal name or toponym that comes across his path. Thus Aparan is linked with the Avars, the Balkhar (the modern name of the Paryadres) mountains with the Bulgars, or Sysperitis (Sper/İspir) with the Scythians.³³ Two German scholars, Wolfgang Feurstein and Tucha Berdsena have summarized his technique quite well:

At first Kırzioğlu assaults the reader with a flow of names of historical peoples; he then searches for some kind of phonetic correspondence or similarity with an old Turkish tribe, flavors this alleged historical outpouring with a pinch of ‘Islam’, and presents himself as a competent researcher of Turkishness. Probably never before has a single person in Turkey falsified history so massively!³⁴

Indeed, factual mistakes or outright lies do not seem to have bothered Kırzioğlu, and they abound in his texts. We do not know of any Arsacid king of Armenia named Ardashes/Artashes. The Parthians and their ruling family were of Iranian and not Turkic origin, while the Amaduni name antedated Hamadan by several centuries, as the Ectabana of classical times became Hamadan only after the Muslim conquest.³⁵ Moreover, Kırzioğlu’s style is often confused and his writings are marred with contradictions. Thus, after claiming that the Hemshinli are Oghuz Turks, he states in another of his publications that they are Balkar Turks. The latter actually do not belong to the Oghuz but to the Kipchak branch of the Turks.³⁶

Further examples are not necessary since it is not the aim of this article to demonstrate the fallacy of Kırzioğlu’s theories but rather to study how they have influenced Hemshin identity. And indeed Kırzioğlu’s theories have influenced the Hemshinli. No scholar has enjoyed more influence than Kırzioğlu among the population of the eastern Black Sea region in general and the Hemshinli in particular. A Kırzioğlu school of Black Sea and Hemshin history can be said to have come into existence, with an overwhelming majority of local historians finding their inspiration in his theories. Like their mentor, these ‘scholars’ produce spurious scholarship made out of a mixture of ignorance and nationalism. Many acknowledge their intellectual debt to Kırzioğlu and do not hide their admiration for him. Thus, one of these historians, Ali Gündüz, praises him as ‘our great historian M. Fahrettin KIRZIOĞLU, the authority on the history of northeast Anatolia’.³⁷ Another amateur historian, possibly himself a Hemshinli, İbrahim Dilmaç, after similarly praising Kırzioğlu—and complaining that the latter’s ‘fruitful work’ was ‘a bit underestimated’—writes that Kırzioğlu has ‘completely crushed’ claims about an Armenian origin of the Hemshin.³⁸

Kırzioğlu’s works and the ones produced by his pupils are ubiquitous and constitute the dominant, if not exclusive, paradigm presented in the histories of the region. With the exception of a small book prepared by an Armenian from Istanbul, none of the books published since the early 1990s in Turkey on the Hemshinli and their history contest the Kırzioğlu line or present the Hemshinli as descendants of Islamicized Armenians.³⁹ These studies are often the only

ones available in local libraries and bookstores. Moreover, they have now spread on the internet, where almost every website dedicated to a particular Hemshin district or village includes as its history page a verbatim replica or slightly modified variant of an article promoting the Turkishness of the Hemshinli.⁴⁰ Kırzioğlu's works or those inspired by him have also appeared over the past thirty years in official publications such as the yearbooks of the provinces of Rize and Artvin.⁴¹ This is not surprising, as 'his work not only strengthens the official ideology of the Turkish state; it also provides the basis upon which such ideologies may be built'.⁴²

Hemshin perceptions of history

When asked about their origins, a large majority of Hemshin will now answer that they have Turkish roots stretching back to Central Asia. There may be wide variations among the answers that are offered—with some very extravagant ones indeed—but most narratives will have in common a claim of Turkish ancestry and a denial of an Armenian one.⁴³ These views are a clear confirmation that the historical accounts elaborated by Kırzioğlu and his pupils, with which the Hemshinli have been relentlessly propagandized, have left their marks on the Hemshin, who appear to have internalized Kırzioğlu's version of history to a large extent.

These views are also not surprising in view of the hostile feelings harboured by a large majority of Turks towards Armenians. Given the pronounced Turkish–Armenian antagonism, why would anyone expect the Hemshinli to present themselves as being of Armenian origin or as Islamicized Armenians? Moreover, why would anyone expect them to identify themselves with Armenians, who constitute the most hated ethnic group in Turkey nowadays? Both Rüdiger Benninghaus and Erhan Ersoy have reported how the Hemshinli feared being associated with Armenians in the eyes of Turkish public opinion at a time, in the 1970s and 1980s, when Armenian militant groups were mounting armed attacks against Turkish targets in various countries.⁴⁴ The Hemshin who have migrated to the large cities of western Turkey, where they have established lucrative businesses or are pursuing successful careers in government bureaucracy, clearly prefer a historical narrative that does not jeopardize their relations with the Turkish state. If Kırzioğlu's version of Hemshin history has become so popular, it might well be that it is because there was a demand among the Hemshinli for such a narrative. Pursuing this line of thought, one could argue that had Kırzioğlu not existed, the Hemshin would have invented him.⁴⁵

The Western, or Rize, Hemshin are more determined than the Eastern, or Hopa, Hemshin to assert Turkish origins and deny Armenian ones. The Rize Hemshin are helped in their endeavours to deny Armenian origins by the fact that they have spoken Turkish since around the mid 19th century. The perpetuation of Armenian traditions, such as the holding of a festival to celebrate Vardavar (called *Vartevor* by the Hemshin) along with the presence of numerous Armenian loanwords in the Turkish dialect spoken by the Western Hemshin are explained by the latter as a

natural consequence of their long cohabitation with Armenians in former times. This author was told several times by Hemshin informants, 'The Armenians transmitted to us some of their culture; they left, we remained.' In order to cut all links with Armenians, some Rize Hemshin also tend to dissociate themselves from the Hopa Hemshin, who happen to still speak Armenian. It must be said that this dissociation is made all the easier by the virtual absence of contacts and solidarity between the two Hemshin groups.⁴⁶ Thus, in a letter sent to a newspaper published in the Black Sea region, a Rize Hemshin stated that his group, unlike the Hopa one, was of Turkish origin, and that they had always spoken Turkish. To prove his argument, he pointed out that all the ethnic groups in the region had maintained their separate languages, and that consequently, had the Rize Hemshin ever spoken Armenian, there would have been no reason for them to have lost its usage. The author of the letter, Ali İhsan Arol, a member of the board of the Çamlıhemşin and Hemşin Foundation, wrote that

It is not true that all Hemshinli have Armenian roots. Yes, there are Hemshinli living in the interior of Hopa speaking the Armenian dialect. However, it is known that the Hemshinli in Fındıklı, Ardeşen, Pazar, Çamlıhemşin, Hemşin and Çayeli [counties of the province of Rize] are of Turkish descent. Despite the fact that all other ethnic groups in the area have their own mother tongues, the mother tongue [of the Hemshinli] in the above-mentioned places is Turkish. Imagine a place where Islamicized Armenians speak their tongue, Islamicized Greeks, the Laz, Georgians, Circassians, Abkhaz speak theirs, but the 'Western Hemshinli forget Armenian'.⁴⁷

The Hopa Hemshin have certainly not been on the forefront of the battle for denying Armenian origins to the extent that the Rize Hemshin have because it is more difficult for them to do so given that they speak Armenian. This continued use of an Armenian dialect by the Hopa Hemshin appears to be a thorn in the eye of Turkish nationalists, including some Hopa Hemshin themselves. Thus, a local Turkish historian from the neighbouring province of Trabzon relates how, during his visit to Hopa in the 1940s, he was surprised to hear that Armenian was spoken in some villages of the region. Having asked why the Armenian language had not yet been abandoned, he was told by one of the Hemshinli that 'We would like to abandon [Armenian], but for some reason can not manage to do so' (*Bırakmak istiyoruz, fakat bir türlü muvaffak olamıyoruz*).⁴⁸ Decades later, some Turkish nationalist Hopa Hemshin appear to have found a way to get rid of their cumbersome language. One of them claimed on an internet posting that Hopa Hemshin families are not teaching Homshetsma to their children anymore; the intention here is clearly to hasten the disappearance of the dialect.⁴⁹

However, it is possible that the Hopa Hemshin's lesser virulence in claiming Turkish origins and denying Armenian ones in comparison with the Rize Hemshin is perhaps more perception than fact, a perception deriving from the difference in the education levels of the two groups. Enjoying a higher degree of education than the Hopa Hemshin, the Rize Hemshin have consequently been more active in both printed outlets and on the internet in discussing their origins, and hence more visible. This hypothesis finds confirmation in two recent publications prepared by Hopa Hemshin in which the latter are presented

as Turks hailing from Khorasan. The author of one of these works, Remzi Yılmaz, claims that the Hopa Hemshin do not speak Armenian, but a 'Kipchak/Oghuz' dialect containing some Armenian loanwords. Moreover, Yılmaz does not hide his hostility towards Armenians, who according to him only desire to create problems for Turkey.⁵⁰ While not going as far as Yılmaz in denying that Homshetsma is an Armenian dialect, several Hopa Hemshin met by this author attribute their use of Armenian to coexistence with Armenians in past times.

Of course, one might wonder whether the Hemshin really do believe in their Turkish origins as strongly as they are claiming to and whether they have so fully internalized the historical narratives offered to them by nationalist Turkish historians that they have completely eliminated from their memory any knowledge of Armenian ancestry. This question would only be natural in view of the political context in Turkey, which is not really conducive to an acknowledgement of Armenian origins. Are the Hemshin practicing a form of *taqiyya*, the art of dissimulation elaborated centuries ago by Middle Eastern minorities fearing persecution, and have they preserved, even as 'an uncomfortable private secret', some knowledge of their Armenian ancestry?⁵¹ It is difficult to find an answer to this question, especially as outsiders to the group are not likely to receive an answer if they ask the question, and also because answers might vary according to individuals. Some perhaps have heard about Armenian ancestry but prefer not to discuss it or deny it, while others might be sincerely unaware of such ancestry, as in the case of İsmet Akbıyık, the informant of Dumézil on the Hemshin dialect.

However, an Armenian origin of the Hemshin, denied by most and conceivably kept as a dark secret by others, is admitted openly by a few, as one still comes across Hemshin individuals among both Rize and Hopa groups who admit to some Armenian connection. In some cases, this Armenian connection is mixed with a Turkish one. Thus, the anthropologist Paul Magnarella was told in 1986 by several Hemshinli of 'their combined Armenian and Turkish ancestry'.⁵² Others who admit to some sort of Armenian ancestry will mention that their family founder was a migrant to the area, usually from Central Asia, who married within the Hemshinli community and gradually assimilated. This claim could be true in a few individual cases, as it is possible that a few immigrants, if not Turks from Central Asia, but more probably Turks or other Muslims from various regions of the Ottoman Empire, settled in Hemshin and became 'Hemshinized' over time.⁵³ Yet it is first and foremost a way of 'saving' one's family past while admitting the 'painful truth' for the rest of the group.

In other cases, Armenian origins are openly acknowledged without reference to mixture with Turkish elements. Most of those recognizing such ancestry tend to be elderly people who have lived all their lives in the rural Hemshin areas of the provinces of Rize and Hopa. Indeed, there appears to be a reverse correlation between wealth and influence on the one hand and acknowledgement of Armenian origins on the other. Unlike the Hemshin established as business owners or government officials in Istanbul or Ankara, elderly farmers who have remained in their villages do not feel the same need to maintain positive relations with the state system. Less constrained to tell a version of history that toes the official state line, they do not

see a problem in admitting Armenian origins. As elderly, they are also less worried about the future.⁵⁴

Thus, an elderly Hemshin woman this author met in one of the yaylas of Çamlıhemşin, while very proud of her father's service in the Kemalist Army, said when asked about her origins, 'We are converts from the Armenian'. After a pause of a few seconds, she added 'I am not afraid, what can they do to me?' Then, her daughter added 'all the yayla names you see in this region are Armenian. This used to be an Armenian area.' Elderly women, less indoctrinated than men as a result of not having attended school for a very long time and not having had to perform military service, are generally more forthcoming than men in admitting to Armenian ancestry. In contrast, one is likely to get a very hostile reaction from men in their 50s or 60s at the mention of any Armenian connection of the Hemshin. Members of the younger generation, especially those raised in the large cities of western Turkey, appear to be confused on the question of Hemshin origins yet are quite curious to learn more about them.

Even as most Hemshin try to forget any connections with Armenians, they are reminded of these links by their Lazi neighbours, some of whom refer to the Hemshin as *Sumekhi*, and to the land of Hemshin itself as *Sumekhiti*, the equivalent in the Lazi language (*Lazuri*) of the word used in the related Georgian language to describe Armenians, *Somekhi*, and Armenia, *Somkheti*.⁵⁵ More derogatorily, the Laz also often refer to the Hemshin as 'Armenian converts' (*ermenî dönmesi*), or as 'thick-ribbed Armenians' (*kalin kaburgalı ermeni*). The Hemshin, in turn, retaliate by calling the Lazi 'Mingrelian converts' (*megrel dönmesi*).⁵⁶ Both groups thus appear to be calling into question the authenticity of the other's Turkish descent, as well as the sincerity of its devotion to Islam, while maintaining no doubt about their own Turkish descent and the strength of their Islamic faith.⁵⁷

The consciousness of Armenian origins is also felt in some folk tales containing allusions to Armenian participation in the foundation of the Hemshin community. The tale of the two Armenian brothers Ham and Shen who settled in Hamshen and whose descendants later converted to Islam has already been discussed above, as this folk tale sparked the ire of Kırzioğlu and led him to embark on his project of rewriting Hemshin history.⁵⁸ In some of these tales the Armenian element is mixed with a Turkish one, thus reflecting the mixed Armenian and Turkish influences in the formation of Hemshin identity. In one such tale, two Hemshin youths named Azaklı and Bozacı were wandering in the lower sections of the Firtina Valley some 300–400 years ago when they spotted wood shavings indicating the presence of settlements higher up the valley. They went upstream to the yaylas, where they were taken prisoner by an Armenian lord. The story ends with the lord marrying his daughters to the two youths and leaving them his lands.⁵⁹

Another tale traces the foundation of the village of Tepan (now Bilen, in the Hemşin county of Rize) to an Armenian valley lord named Ösker who was later joined by a Turk nicknamed Keleş (handsome) in one version and Koroğlu in another. All the inhabitants of the village are said to be descendants of the families of the Armenian Ösker and the Turk Keleş.⁶⁰ The mixed Armenian and Turkish

components of Hemshin identity are similarly mirrored in a third folk tale, narrated this time by a Hopa Hemshinli. According to this tale, the Hemshin are the descendants of a Turkish pasha and his Armenian bride. The Pasha is said to have abandoned his wife when he was appointed to another position outside of the region.⁶¹ In addition to folk tales, some folk songs show that the knowledge of Armenian origins is still being preserved in the Hemshin's collective memory, even at a subconscious level. Thus, a song that is performed at Rize Hemshin weddings contains the following lines:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Uncle cook are you here | <i>Aşçı dayı burda misen</i> |
| Are you still of the old religion | <i>Gene eski dinden misen</i> |
| Are you an Armenian convert | <i>Ermeniden dönme misen</i> ⁶² |

Ottoman era roots of Hemshin identity

The acceptance by most Hemshinli of historical theories giving them a Turkish lineage and their rejection of Armenian origins is obviously linked to Armenian–Turkish antagonism. It is better to claim Turkic ancestors from Central Asia than Armenian ones in the modern Turkish Republic. Yet, the preference of the Hemshinli for this thesis also has deeper roots that go back to Ottoman times. In order to fully understand how modern-day Hemshin identity was shaped, a historical perspective must be considered along with more recent factors.

In the pre-national context of the Ottoman Empire, people identified themselves in terms of their membership in a particular religious community, or *millet*. Thus, being ‘Armenian’ prior to the import of the European idea of nation to the Ottoman Empire meant belonging to the Armenian Apostolic Church and the millet it composed. Leaving the Armenian Church to join another Christian denomination or Islam also meant that one stopped being part of the Armenian ‘nation’. During his visit to the region in the 1840s, German botanist Karl Koch was told by his guides in the Kiskim district that he would be taken to a village inhabited by ‘Franks’. Along the way, he wondered how a European colony had settled in such a remote place.⁶³ Once he arrived in the village of Karmirk, he was surprised to find a total absence of Europeans; the local population was composed exclusively of Armenians, called Franks (*Firengi*) because of their Catholic creed (Catholic villages in Armenia are nowadays still designated as *Firengi*).

Reflecting on the variances in the understanding of the idea of nation, Koch—who came from a Germany where the concept of nation was fermenting—stated that ‘in Asia, peoples [*völker* in the text] are more frequently differentiated by religion than by descent’.⁶⁴ ‘Armenian’ was used interchangeably with ‘Christian’, and ‘Turk’ with ‘Muslim’—a practice that continues to this day among most of Turkey’s rural population. That one could possibly be ‘Turk’ and ‘Christian’ or ‘Armenian’ and ‘Muslim’ was—and still is—a concept simply beyond the grasp of most of the Ottoman Empire’s inhabitants, an anomaly.

The amalgamation of nation and religion in the Ottoman Empire was sometimes extended to language: Anthony Bryer, British historian of the Pontos, was told in

the 1960s by a local Turkish peasant that Greek people who spoke 'Christian' once used to live in the region of Trabzon.⁶⁵ Amalgamation between nation, religion and language could explain, in combination with social and economic factors affecting Ottoman society in the Pontos from the 1840s on, and in addition to government persecution, the disappearance of the Armenian language from Hemshin proper, or Bash Hemshin.

This analysis is important as it could help to compensate for the lack of sources or documents on the exact circumstances of the disappearance of Armenian in Hemshin, which are largely unknown. Nineteenth-century Armenian authors are silent on the loss of language in Hemshin. They do, however, mention large-scale persecution by government officials from the mid 19th century on that led to the disappearance of Armenian in the region of Sev-Get, or Karadere, where there was an Islamicized Armenian community of Hamshenite origin.⁶⁶ According to Sargis Haykuni and P. Tumayian, government officials launched a campaign to eradicate the Armenian language in Karadere after part of the Islamicized population of that district attempted to revert to Christianity in the wake of the promulgation in 1856 by Sultan Abdülmecid of the *Hatt-i Hümayun* decree, which granted religious equality between Muslims and non-Muslims. Measures were also taken to increase Islamic religious teaching in order to stem the flow of reversion to Christianity among both Islamicized Greek and Armenian populations of the Pontos.⁶⁷ It is possible, and even highly likely, that similar measures aiming to forbid the use of Armenian were taken in Hemshin during the same period.

Even though certain languages were thus associated with certain religions, there was in theory no legal or religious obstacle in the Ottoman Empire that would prevent members of any millet from speaking any language. There were frequent cases all over Asia Minor of Armenians speaking Turkish—or Kurdish for that matter—as their first or even as their only language. Because Turkish was the medium of communication among the peoples of the empire, it was a logical development that Armenians or members of other minority communities chose to adopt it.

The reverse case, in which members of the dominant Muslim millet spoke a language identified with the *gâvur* (giaour, i.e. infidels) was a much rarer occurrence, and constituted a paradox, if not a sin. Thus, Muslims of the Artvin region who spoke 'Georgian-Christian' confessed to Koch that they were aware of committing a sin by using in the homes of believers 'a language of giaours which, however, they had received from God with their mother's milk'. Yet, their hopes of going to Paradise were not lost, because they knew 'the holy Turkish language'; hence, 'God and the angels would be understanding'.⁶⁸ Similarly, the agha of Atina (Pazar) told the German linguist Georg Rosen that speaking Laz was comparable for him to committing a sin.⁶⁹

By dropping Armenian for Turkish at some point during the second half of the 19th century, the Islamicized Armenians of Hemshin put an end to what amounted at the very least to a paradoxical situation and was often held as a sin. They also completed, in the words of Bryer, religious conversion with 'social conversion' and achieved their transition from the Armenian millet to the Muslim one.⁷⁰

The connection between loss of language and religious conversion to Islam is echoed in the words of a Hemshin woman, Aynur Altaş who, in an article titled ‘Hemşinoloji’, writes that ‘a language was born, a religion was born ... A language was changed, a religion was changed ...’ (*Dil doğdu, din doğdu ... Dil değişti, din değişti ...*).⁷¹

Furthermore, the Pontos had entered a new era during the 1840s, marked by the defeat of the derebeys and the reassertion of central power. This new era offered opportunities for social and economic mobility that may have contributed to the abandonment of the Armenian language. The careers of Mehmed Ali Pasha—who became Grand-Admiral, Grand-Vizier, and married a daughter of the Sultan—and of numerous ulemas epitomize the advancement of Hemshinli in Muslim Ottoman society, or as Michael Meeker calls it, ‘the imperial system’.⁷² The correlation between social status and loss of language was also visible among the Lazi during the second half of the 19th century, as it was often men of influence and wealth who expressed to European travellers contempt for their native language.⁷³ Even the Hemshinli who did not attain prestigious careers may have felt it necessary to adopt Turkish as a first language in lieu of Armenian. Migrations—as well as military conscription—are likely to have played a central role in the language switch. Driven by economic necessity to larger coastal towns or to Istanbul where they primarily spoke Turkish, Hemshinli men may have continued to do so after returning to their villages. The fate of Armenian in Hemshin—and in Sev-Get (Karadere)—may have been similar to that of another regional language, Breton. The loss of the latter is believed to have been caused to a greater extent by soldiers who continued to speak the French they had grown accustomed to in the trenches of World War One after returning home to Brittany than by the mandatory education of children in French, introduced a few decades earlier.⁷⁴

The weakness of the rationale linked to economic and social mobility, however, is its failure to explain why, placed in similar circumstances, various Georgian, Lazuri and Greek-speaking Muslim communities managed to cling to their ancestral languages, while the Hemshinli and others abandoned them.⁷⁵ Moreover, language is primarily transmitted by mothers, not by fathers, and the migration factor does not explain how Hemshinli women, who did not attend school and who remained in their home villages, came to stop speaking Armenian. A possible answer to these questions might be that the Armenian language in Hemshin went underground rather than having disappeared. Writing on the Islamicized Armenians of the Chorokh (now Çoruh) Basin, in Olti (Oltu) and elsewhere, the Armenian author Atrpet complained that they had lost their language, while the Islamicized Georgians of Ajaria had managed to preserve theirs. Yet, he noticed that while these villagers had lost Armenian for Turkish, ‘their tone, pronunciation, declamation and phrase structure were those of Armenian, and even in their spoken dialect many Armenian words continued to be used’.⁷⁶ The same happened in Hemshin, as the local Turkish dialect replacing Armenian contained numerous Armenian loanwords.⁷⁷ The importance of these loanwords, often used in emotionally attached activities, has led Wolfgang Feurstein to write that the linguistic context in Hemshin would be more correctly described as a

transfer of essentially Armenian elements into a new medium, the Turkish language, rather than as a displacement of Armenian.⁷⁸

It is in all likelihood their marginal existence as pastoralists that allowed for the survival of the Armenian language among the Hopa Hemshin. The latter were too unimportant to be a cause of worry for the state and they were certainly not worth the same type of government pressure that contributed to the abandonment of Armenian in Karadere. Also, provincial secular and religious authorities, as Russian officials in later times, may simply not have been aware of or even have suspected that this small Muslim community, which some believed to be Kurdish, was actually Armenian speaking. A second possible reason for the preservation of the Armenian language lies in the absence of economically induced migrations among the Hopa Hemshinli, who did not share the economic mobility of their compatriots in Bash Hemshin.⁷⁹ The Hopa Hemshinli, furthermore, did not participate in the sometimes spectacular social ascent enjoyed by the Bash Hemshinli beginning in the 1850s or even earlier. Less integrated into Ottoman society as it developed in 19th century Pontos, the Hopa Hemshinli consequently had fewer incentives to abandon their mother tongue.

Conclusion

An overwhelming majority of Hemshin have adopted a version of history that describes them as having Turkish ancestry and emphatically denies an Armenian one. This thesis has the advantage of bringing Hemshin history in line with the official Turkish history thesis that has been promoted by Turkish authorities since the early 1930s. It also provides the Hemshin with historical credentials acceptable within the current socio-political context of Turkey, in which Armenians constitute one of the most hated ethnic groups. Furthermore, the Hemshin's adoption of a Turkish nationalist version of their own history has deeper roots, as Islamic community and Turkish ethnicity have been considered one and the same by most inhabitants of Turkey since Ottoman times.

However, knowledge of Armenian origins has not been entirely displaced among the Hemshin. It has survived in the open admission of Armenian ancestry by elderly people encountered in their villages or pastures. Knowledge of a link with Armenians has also survived at a subconscious level in the collective memory of the Hemshin, occasionally resurfacing in expressions of local folklore, such as the celebration of Vardavar, in folk tales, or in popular songs. In addition to the preservation of Armenian by the Hopa Hemshin and of Armenian loanwords by the Bash Hemshin, it is this knowledge, even if residual, that has allowed the Hemshin to maintain their distinct group identity to this day.

That a few Hemshin acknowledge Armenian ancestry or some sort of links with Armenians should not, however, be confused with a desire to return to the fold of Armenianness. For over three centuries now, the Hemshin have been part, along with the other ethnic groups of the region, such as the Lazi, Muslim Georgians, or the Greek-speaking Muslims, of a common Black Sea Muslim society that has successfully managed to transcend ethnicity and impose itself over ethnic differences.

Notes and references

1. In this article, the two forms, 'Hemshin' and 'Hemshinli', will be used interchangeably to describe the Islamized Armenians of Hemshin. Some scholars prefer the first solution, arguing that Hemshin describes more properly members of the ethnic group, while Hemshinli is more a geographic description. Others opt for Hemshinli, as the term, according to them, is used exclusively to describe members of the group and would not be used to designate outsiders—even if they were to settle in one of the many settlements with a name containing the word Hemshin. Rize, Bash, or Western Hemshin or Hemshinli will be used to describe the members of the group living in the traditional Hemshin region, in the province of Rize. Hopa or Eastern Hemshin or Hemshinli will be used for the members of the group settled principally in the Hopa county of the province of Artvin. 'Hamshen Armenians' or 'Hamshenite Armenians' will refer to the Christian ancestors of the Hemshin and the descendants of those who refused to convert to Islam, now settled primarily in Abkhazia and southern Russia. 'Hamshen' will generally be used to designate the district prior to the Ottoman conquest and 'Hemshin' for the period after it.
2. Georges Dumézil, 'Notes sur le parler d'un Arménien musulman de Hemşin', *Académie Royale de Belgique, Mémoires, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, Vol 57, No 4, 1964, p 6. The other three articles are 'Notes sur le parler d'un Arménien musulman d'Ardala (Vilayet de Rize)', *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, Vol 2, 1965, pp 135–142; 'Trois récits dans le parler des Arméniens musulmans de Hemşin', *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, Vol 4, 1967, pp 19–35; and 'Un roman policier en arménien d'Ardala', *Revue des Études Arméniennes*, Vol 20, 1986, pp 7–27.
3. Verzhine S. Svazlian, *Polsahayots banahiwsutiwne* [The Folklore of the Armenians of Constantinople] (Erevan: 'Gitutian' Publishing House of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Armenia, 2000), p 370; 'Hemshintsinere bawakan ush andradardzan, vor irenk haykakan tsakum unin' [The Hemshin realized quite late that they have Armenian origins], *Marmara* (Istanbul), 25 November 1996; reprint, *Abaka* (Montreal), 30 December 1996, p 3.
4. For a review of developments in the 1990s in Turkey on the subject of ethnic minorities, see Peter Alford Andrews, 'A Reappraisal', in Peter Alford Andrews and Rüdiger Benninghaus, eds, *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey: Supplement and Index* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2002), pp 9–25. The first volume was published in 1989.
5. The headgear, known as *puşi*, is made of a scarf placed on the head around which is tied a synthetic or silk cloth with a leopard-skin type pattern combining bright-coloured—generally either yellow, orange or red—spots on a black background. The bright colors of the *puşi* made two British alpinists say that local 'women dress like peacocks in splendid costumes'. Robin Fedden and Basil Goodfellow, 'Kaçkar (north eastern Turkey)', *Alpine Journal*, Vol 69, No 308, May 1964, p 131.
6. Newspaper and magazine articles include Hugh Pope, 'Bullfights and a secret quest for gold', *The Independent*, 21 July 1990, p 41; Hugh Pope, 'Market scene: cashing in on glasnost in a remote corner of Turkey', *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1990, section H, p 4; Jonathan Futrell, 'Hidden Turkey', *The Sunday Times*, 9 May 1999; John Kellie, 'Summit else', *Scottish Daily Record*, 5 January 2002, pp 1 and 11; Jeremy Seal, 'On the road in the land of Noah', *The Sunday Times*, 7 April 2002; Erla Zwingle, 'Crucible of the Gods', *National Geographic*, Vol 202, No 3, September 2002, pp 74–101; Johnny Morris, 'Grail trail: mad honey', *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 June 2003, p 18; and Jill Crawshaw, 'Floral delight', *The Times*, 29 January 2005, p 19. In addition to the excellent travel guides published in Turkey by Sevan and Müjde Nişanyan, one can list among guidebooks mentioning the Hemshin, Marc Dubin and Enver Lucas, *Trekking in Turkey* (Hawthorn, Vic., Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1989), pp 125–126; Karl Smith, *The Mountains of Turkey* (Milnthorpe, UK: Cicerone Press, 1994), p 44; Rosie Ayliffe, Marc Dubin and John Gawthrop, *Turkey: The Rough Guide*, 3rd edn (London: The Rough Guide, 1997), pp 655–659; Tom Brosnahan and Pat Yale, *Turkey: A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit*, 5th edn (Hawthorn, Vic., Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1997), pp 641–643; Astrid Lorber, *Turquie de l'ouest et mer Noire* (Paris: Guide Bleus Évasion/Hachette Tourisme, 1998), p 286; Semra Mesulam and others, eds, *Let's Go Turkey 1999* (Cambridge, MA: Let's Go Publications, 1999), pp 66, 347–348 and 350–353; and Frédérique Sarfati and others, eds, *Turquie* (Paris: Guides Bleus/Hachette Tourisme, 2001), pp 714–716 and 730–731.
7. 'How green is their valley', *The Economist*, 27 August 2005, p 43.
8. On the role of intellectuals in 'creating nations' or awakening 'dormant' ones, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).
9. The Fırtına River is the Prytanis, Portanis, or Pordanis of earlier times. Its two branches are the smaller Hala (Khala) Dere and the main Büyük Dere.
10. Sevan Nişanyan, Landon Thomas and Gabriele Ohl, *Zoom in Black Sea: A Traveler's Guide to Turkey's Black Sea Region* (Istanbul: Boyut Yayın Grubu/Boyut Publishing Group, 1990), p 117.
11. Karl Koch, *Wanderungen im Oriente Während der Jahre 1843 und 1844*, Vol 2, *Reise im Pontische Gebirge und Türkische Armenien* (Weimar: Landes Industrie Comptoires, 1846), pp 32–33.

12. This figure has been calculated as the average between 1980 and 1985, the year the meteorologic observatory in Çamlıhemşin was closed. I thank Erhan Gürsel Ersoy for providing with data.
13. Sevan Nişanyan and Mijde Nişanyan, *Karadeniz: Meraklısı İçin Gezi Rehberi—Black Sea: A Traveller's Handbook for Northern Turkey* (Istanbul: Boyut Yayın Grubu, 2000), p. 140.
14. Ibid; Ruy González de Clavijo, *Embajada a Tamorlán*, edited, introduced and annotated by Francisco López Estrada (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1999), pp. 352–353; P. Tumayian, 'Pontosi Hayere: Ashkharhagragan yev kaghakakan vichak Trapizoni' [The Armenians of the Pontos: geographic and political situation of Trabzon], *Lumay: Grakan Handes*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1899, p. 164; for a physical description of the Pontos, see Anthony Bryer, 'Greeks and Türkmens: the Pontic exception', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 29, 1975, pp. 118–120; reprinted in *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1980); Anthony Bryer and David Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), pp. 1–7 and 54–57; and Xavier de Planhol, *Minorités en Islam: Géographie politique et sociale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997), pp. 53–54 and 132–133.
15. Hetoum, *A Lytell Cronycle: Richard Pynson's Translation (c. 1520) of La Fleur des histoires de la terre d'Orient (c. 1307)*, ed. Glenn Burger, Toronto Medieval Texts and Translations, No. 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 14–15.
16. The Zuğa or Susa River is now called Hemşin in its upstream section and Pazar when it approaches the coast; it was known in classical times as the Zagatis, from which was derived the name Zuğa or Susa in the Ottoman period. The valley formed by this river now constitutes the county of Hemşin and part of the Pazar county. The Senes or Senoz River, the valley of which corresponds to the Kaptanpaşa *bucak* (district) of the Çayeli county, was known in classical times as the Adienos. The Cimil River is an affluent of the Kalopotamos River. From their base in the valley of the Cimil River, the princes of Hamshen periodically brought under their control the highland section of the entire basin constituted by the Kalopotamos and its other affluents, i.e. the modern-day İkizdere county of the Rize province. The Kalopotamos or Kalos River is now called İkizdere in its upstream section, and becomes the İyidere when it nears the sea.
17. Minas G. Gasapian [Farhat], *Hayere Nikomidioy Gawari mej* [The Armenians of the Nicomedia District] (Partizak, Turkey: Azatamart, 1913), pp. 85–86 and 106–111.
18. Nikolai Iakovlevich Marr, 'Iz poezdki v Turetskii Lazistan: Vpechatleniia i nabliudeniia' [Travels in Turkish Lazistan: impressions and observations], *Izvestiia Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk—Bulletin de l'Académie Impériale des Sciences de St-Petersbourg*, Vol. 4 (6th ser), No. 8, 1 May 1910, pp. 609–612; Chris Hann, 'Ethnicity, language and politics in north-east Turkey', in Cora Govers and Hans Vermeulen, eds, *The Politics of Ethnic Consciousness* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 129; Ildikó Bellér-Hann and Chris Hann, *Turkish Region: State, Market and Social Identities on the East Black Sea Coast* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2001), pp. 48–56, 200–201 and n. 8.
19. Hann, op cit, Ref. 18, pp. 137–138.
20. The title of a 1972 article in a Hemshin magazine was 'Let this flow stop'. Günhan Tarakçı, 'Dursun Artık Bu Akin' [Let this flow stop], *Seyran (Pokut): Makrevis Mahallesi Yardımlaşma ve Kalkındırma Derneği*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 19 March 1972, p. 8.
21. On the Hemshin in the former Soviet Union, see Alexandre Bennigsen and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide* (London: C. Hurst, 1986), p. 218; Hovann H. Simonian, 'The vanished Khemshins: return from the brink', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2002, pp. 375–385.
22. Hagop Hachikian, 'Notes on the historical geography and present territorial distribution of the Hemshinli', in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 168–176.
23. For a detailed history of Hemshin, see the chapters by Elizabeth Redgate, Hovann Simonian, Christina Maranci and Alexandre Toumarkine in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006).
24. On the integration of the eastern Black Sea region or Pontos in the Ottoman Empire, see Michael E. Meeker, *A Nation of Empire: The Ottoman Legacy of Turkish Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).
25. Rüdiger Benninghaus, 'Zur Herkunft und Identität der Hemşinli', in Peter Alford Andrews and Rüdiger Benninghaus, eds, *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1989), p. 479 and n. 17; Hamdi Alemdar, *Rize İli 100. Yıl Örnek Köyü: Cimil Rehberi* [On the Occasion of the 100th Anniversary [of Atatürk's Birth], A Model Village of the Rize Province: the Guide to Cimil] (Samsun?, n.d.), p. 190.
26. Piro, 'Tachkatsats Hayer' [Turkified Armenians], *Nor-Dar*, Vol. 10, No. 227, 21 December 1893, p. 3.
27. For more details on the birth and development of the official Turkish historiography, see the brilliant study of Étienne Copeaux, *Espaces et temps de la nation turque: Analyse d'une historiographie nationaliste, 1931–1993* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 1997).
28. As an example, see the introductory pages in *La question du Pont-Euxin* (Constantinople: Imprimerie Ahmed Ihsan et Cie, 1923), a book published to counter Greek claims on the Pontos; Copeaux, op cit, Ref. 27, pp. 33–49.

29. Hüseyin Avni Bey (Tirebolulu Alparslan), ‘Trabzon İli Lâz mı Türk mü?’ [Is the Trabzon Province Laz or Turkish?], in İsmail Hacıfettahoğlu, ed., *Sakarya Şehidi Binbaşı Hüseyin Avni Bey—Tirebolulu Alparslan—Hayatı-Eserleri—Trabzon İli Lâz mı Türk mü? Tirebolulu H. Alp Arslan* [The Sakarya Martyr Commander Hüseyin Avni Bey—Tirebolulu Alparslan—His Life-Works—Is the Trabzon Province Laz or Turkish?] (Kocatepe/Ankara: Atlas Yayınları, 1999), p 136. The original work was published in 1921.
30. M. Rıza, *Benlik ve Dilbirliğimiz* [Identity and the Unity of Our Language], 2nd edn (Ankara: Türk Kültürünü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982), pp 35–36 (first edition published in 1933). The main objective of the book was to prove the Turkishness of the Kurds; the Hemshinli were only mentioned marginally.
31. M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, ‘Eski-Oğuz (Arsaklı-Part) Kalıntısı Hemşenliler’ [The Remnants of the Old Oghuz (Arsacid-Parthian): the Hemshenli], *Türk Folklor Araştırmaları*, Vol 17, No. 10 (203), June 1966, pp 4099–4004. This article is considered Kırzioğlu’s seminal work on Hemshin history. However, in it, he mentions having written an article on the subject for a Hemshin magazine published in Ankara in 1950. He later disseminated his ideas in many other publications.
32. Kırzioğlu, op cit, Ref 31, pp 4100–4104; M. Fahrettin Kırzioğlu, *Karadeniz Bölgesindeki Türk Boylarından Lazlar ve Hemşinliler’in Tarihçesi* [From the Turkish Tribes of the Black Sea Region: The History of the Laz and the Hemshinli] (Ankara: Rizeliler Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği Yayınıdır, 1994), pp 12–16.
33. Along with the Amatunis and the Arsacids, most Armenian dynasties and historical figures are presented by Kırzioğlu as Turkic. So is the founder of the Armenian Church, Saint Gregory the Illuminator (‘Aziz Greguvar’ or ‘Aziz Grigor’), who as Parthian is consequently also a Turk; and the Mamikonian princes who according to him, came not from China but from Kashgar (in eastern Turkestan); and the Bagratunis who are presented as ‘Sakas’ (Scythians), and hence as Turks. Also, to avoid classifying someone as Armenian, he tends to replace that description by ‘Grigoryen’.
34. Wolfgang Feurstein and Tucha Berdsena, ‘Die Lasen. Eine südkaukasische Minderheit in der Türkei’, *Pogrom: Zeitschrift für bedrohte Völker*, No 129 (3), 1987, p 38. The translation of this passage into English is taken from Rüdiger Benninghaus, ‘Turk and Hemshinli: manipulating ethnic origin and ethnic identity’, in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), p 359.
35. The Amatunis are first mentioned in the fourth century AD.
36. For a critical analysis of Kırzioğlu’s theories, see Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 25, pp 479–482; Ildikó Bellér-Hann, ‘Myth and history on the eastern Black Sea coast’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 14, No 4, 1995, pp 491–495; as well as Erhan Gürsel Ersoy, ‘“Herkesin Türklüğü” ne Dair Yerel Yansımalar Örnekler: Lazlar ve Hemşinliler’ [Examples of local reflections regarding ‘Everybody’s Turkishness’: The Case of the Lazi and the Hemshinli], *Toplum ve Bilim*, No 96, Spring 2003, pp 75–92. I am deeply indebted for this section to Rüdiger Benninghaus’ last work on Turkish historiography and the Hemshinli, op cit, Ref 34, pp 353–388.
37. Ali Gündüz, *Hemşinliler: Dil–Tarih–Kültür* [The Hemshinli: Language–History–Culture] (Ankara: Ardanuçlular Kültür ve Yardımlaşma Derneği, 2002), pp 49–50.
38. İbrahim Dilmaç was born in the county of Ardeşen, which includes both Lazi and Hemshinli. He is a functionary and a member of the ultra-nationalist *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (MHP)* (The Nationalist Movement Party). Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 34, pp 375, n 39, and 377, n 61. A thorough discussion of these local histories as they have appeared in print or on the internet is included in Benninghaus’ article.
39. That small book was a translation into Turkish of Levon Khachikyan’s article on the history of Hamshen Armenians that had originally appeared in 1969 in the journal *Banber Erevani Hamalsarani* [Bulletin of Erevan University]. Levon Haçikyan, *Hemşin Gizemi: Hamşen Ermenileri Tarihinden Sayfalar* [The mystery of Hemshin: Pages from the History of Hamshen Armenians], translated and edited by Bağdik Avedisyan, 2nd rev. edn (İstanbul: Belge Yayınları, 1997). Hâle Soysü’s book, *Kavimler Kapısı* [The Door of Peoples], Vol 1 (İstanbul: Kaynak Yayınları/Güney Yayıncılık ve Sanayi, 1992) should also be mentioned. In it, the author discusses the Armenian origin of the Hemshinli. However, that book is not devoted exclusively to the Hemshin, but to several other minority groups as well.
40. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 34, pp 358ff. Also see Ersoy, op cit, Ref 36, p 85, n 19.
41. For examples, see the history sections of *Artvin 1967 İl Yıllığı* [The 1967 Yearbook of the Artvin Province] (Ankara: Güneş Matbaası, 1968); *Artvin 1973 İl Yıllığı* [The 1973 Yearbook of the Artvin Province] (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1973); or *Cumhuriyetimizin 75. Yılında Rize* [Rize in the 75th Year of Our Republic] (Rize: Rize Valiliği/Akademi Yayıncılık, 1998).
42. Bellér-Hann, op cit, Ref 36, p 491.
43. Perhaps the one exception to the claim of Turkish ancestry was the version this author was told during a trip to the region in 1998 that the Hemshin were ‘Arabs from Central Asia’. Yet the mention of Central Asia maintains the connection with Turkishness.
44. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 25, p 486; Erhan Gürsel Ersoy, ‘The Hemshin people: ethnic identity, beliefs and Yayla Festivals in Çamlıhemşin’, in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), p 323.
45. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 34, p 358.

46. On the cultural, social and economic differences between the two Hemshin groups and the lack of a common consciousness uniting them, see Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 25, pp 487–90; and Hagop Hachikian, ‘Some particulars of Hemshin identity’, in Hovann H. Simonian, ed, *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp 305–306.
47. Ali İhsan Arol, ‘Her Hemşinli Ermeni Değil’ [Not every Hemshin is Armenian], *Yeni Yüzyıl* (Istanbul), 30 November 1996; reprint in Haçikyan, op cit, Ref 39, 2nd rev. edn, pp 91–92. The translation of this passage into English is taken from Hachikian, op cit, Ref 46, p 309.
48. Hasan Ümur, *Of ve Of Muharebeleri* [Of and the Battles of Of] (Istanbul: Güven Basımevi, 1949), p 11. Of is one of the counties of the province of Trabzon. Some of its inhabitants, the *Oflu*, are Muslims speaking a Pontic Greek dialect.
49. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 34, p 366.
50. Cihan Topaloğlu, ‘Merhaba Topaloğulları’ [Hello the Topaloğulları], *Topaloğulları: Topaloğulları Derneği Yayın Organıdır*, Vol 1, No 1, n.d. (probably published between 1998 and 2000), pp 15–16. This article was published in the magazine of the Topaloğlu (Turkish plural Topaloğulları), a Hopa Hemshin family whose members claim to be the largest family in Turkey. The politician Köksal Toptan, who was at various times during the 1990s a member of the Turkish government, is a member of this family. Remzi Yılmaz was born in Hopa and is in all likelihood a Hopa Hemshinli himself, even if he does not acknowledge this explicitly. Remzi Yılmaz, *Hemşin’in Tarihi Köklerine Doğru: Yöresel Tarih Araştırması* [Towards the Historical Roots of Hemshin: A Research in Local History] (Istanbul: Kum Saati Yayıncılık, 2003), pp 14–27.
51. Taqiyya was invented and used by Shia Muslims who feared persecution at the hands of the Sunni Muslim majority. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 34, p 367; Bellér-Hann and Hann, op cit, Ref 180, p 11.
52. Paul J. Magnarella, ‘The Hemshin of Turkey: Yayla, a pasture above the clouds’, *The World and I*, Vol 4, No 5, May 1989, p 658.
53. Given the poverty and rugged terrain of Hemshin, it is very unlikely that there was any significant inflow of population in the region. Some government officials may have chosen to stay after having served in the region. On this possible immigration in Ottoman times, see Hovann H. Simonian, ‘Hemshin from Islamicization to the End of the Nineteenth Century’, in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp 82–83.
54. Ersoy, op cit, Ref 44, pp 323–324.
55. Feurstein, ‘Bemerkungen zur Ethnologie der Hemschinen’ unpublished manuscript.
56. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 25, p 491.
57. On relations between the Hemshin and their Lazi neighbors, see Ildikó Bellér-Hann, ‘Hemshinli–Lazi relations in northeast Turkey’, in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp 338–352.
58. Kırzioğlu, op cit, Ref 31, p 4100. See section on Kırzioğlu above in this article.
59. Ersoy, op cit, Ref 44, p 324.
60. Orkun Yaman, ‘Etniklik ve Hemşin Üzerine (Bulutların Ülkesi Hemşin 4)’ [Ethnicity and Hemshin (The Land of Clouds Hemshin 4)], *Halkbilimi: Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Türk Halk Bilimi Topluluğu*, No 7, Autumn 1998, p 57 and n 13 and 14.
61. Hachikian, op cit, Ref 46, p 309.
62. Yaman, op cit, Ref 60, p 57, n 11.
63. Hemshin’s immediate neighbour to the south, the late Ottoman *kaza* of Kiskim, was also known in the earlier Ottoman period as Pertakrag or Peterek. In ancient times, it was the Arseatspor canton of the Armenian Tayk/Georgian Tao province and is now the modern-day Yusufeli county of the Artvin province.
64. Koch, op cit, Ref 11, pp 55–58. The trip to Karmirk was not all lost, given the excellent brandy prepared in the village, which to Koch’s surprise was also highly appreciated by his Turkish guides.
65. Anthony Bryer, ‘The Tourkokratia in the Pontos: some problems and preliminary conclusions’, *Neo-Hellenika*, Vol 1, 1970, p 45.
66. The valley of the Karadere River (Hyssos in classical times, Sev Get in Armenian), located to the east of Trebizond, was one of the major routes of passage connecting Bayburt and the Anatolian hinterland with the Pontic coast. This valley constituted the western part of the Sourmaina/Sürmene district in Trapezuntine and Ottoman times and corresponds now to the Araklı county of the Trabzon province.
67. On the forced conversion of Karadere Armenians to Islam in the eighteenth century, see Simonian, op cit, Ref 53, pp 61–66.
68. Koch, op cit, Ref 11, p 167.
69. Georg Rosen, *Über die Sprache der Lazen* (Berlin: Lemgo and Detmold, Meyersche Hofbuchhandlung, 1844), p 2.

70. Anthony Bryer, 'The Crypto-Christians of the Pontos and Consul William Gifford Palgrave of Trebizond', *Deltio Kentrou Mikrasiatikon Spoudon*, No 4, 1983, pp 24–25.
71. Aynur Altaş, 'Hemşinoloji', *Seyran (Pokut): Makrevis Mahallesi Yardımlaşma ve Kalkındırma Derneği*, 28 February 1969, p 14. This article lists words of the Turkish dialect of the Rize Hemshin, including many Armenian loanwords.
72. Meeker, op cit, Ref 24. Mehmed Ali Pasha (1813–1868) occupied six times the position of Grand Admiral and once that of Grand Vizier. He was married to a daughter of Sultan Mahmud II, which gave him the title of *damad* (son-in-law). His progeny were known as *Damad Mehmed Ali Pasha Zâdeler*, as well as *Hemshinli-zâdeler*. On Mehmed Ali Pasha and other Hemshinli who achieved prestigious careers in the Ottoman political and religious establishment, see Alexandre Toumarkine, 'Ottoman political and religious elites among the Hemshin: mid-nineteenth century to 1926', in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp 100–123.
73. Alexandre Toumarkine, *Les Lazes en Turquie (XIX^e–XX^e siècles)* (Istanbul: Isis, 1995), p 46.
74. Gaëlle Dupont, 'Le parler breton s'est perdu dans les tranchées', *Le Monde*, 6 November 1998, p 12.
75. This question was first asked by A. P. Meghavorian in 1904; A. P. Megavorian [Meghavorian], 'K voprosu ob etnograficheskikh usloviakh razvitiia narodnostei Chorokhskego basseina' [On the question of ethnographic circumstances in the development of the nationalities of the Chorokh Basin], *Izvestiia Kavkazskago otdela Imperatorskago russkago geograficheskago obshchestva*, Vol 17, No 5, 1904, p 367.
76. Atrpet [Sargis Mubayajian], *Chorokhi Awazane* [The Basin of the Çoruh] (Vienna: Mekhitarist Press, 1929), pp 197–198.
77. On Armenian loanwords in the Turkish dialect spoken in Bash Hemshin, see Altaş, op cit, Ref 71, pp 14–15; and Uwe Blaesing, 'Armenian in the vocabulary and culture of the Turkish Hemshinli', in Hovann H. Simonian, ed., *The Hemshin* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp 279–302.
78. Feurstein, op cit, Ref 55.
79. Benninghaus, op cit, Ref 25, p 485.